

## THE ORATION ON THE NAVY BOARDS

### ARGUMENT

THIS was (according to Dionysius) the first speech delivered by Demosthenes before the popular assembly. The date of it was B.C. 354; the occasion as follows :

In the second year of the Social war Chares, who commanded the Athenian fleet, either from inability to maintain his troops, or from motives of selfish avarice, or both causes combined, went into the service of Artabazus, the Ionian satrap, then in revolt against Artaxerxes. To him Chares rendered important assistance, and received a rich recompense in money. At first this measure was approved of at Athens; but in the beginning of the next year an embassy was sent by Artaxerxes, to prefer a formal complaint against Chares for his violation of the peace between Athens and Persia. Chares was immediately ordered to quit the service of Artabazus; but the Athenians soon received intelligence that the Persian king was making vast naval preparations, and they conjectured, not without reason, that these were intended to support their revolted allies. Accordingly they hastened to put an end to the Social war, in which they had met with nothing but disasters, and the same year a negotiation was opened with the allies, and a peace concluded, by which their independence was acknowledged.

Meanwhile the Persian armament was still talked of at Athens, and there were rumours of a threatened invasion, which excited alarm in some, and stirred up the patriotism of others. Statesmen of the old school recalled to mind the glorious days of their ancestors, and imagined the time was come for taking vengeance on the common enemy of Greece. Isocrates was a patriot of that class, as we learn from his extant orations. Others less honest than Isocrates took advantage of the general agitation, and would, for selfish purposes, have precipitated their country into a useless and unseasonable war. An assembly was held to consider what measures should be adopted. A proposal was actually made to declare war against Persia, and invite the other states of Greece to join in the common cause. Orators who supported this motion declaimed about the older times, boasted of Marathon and Salamis, flattered the vanity of their countrymen, and appealed to the national prejudices. What the temper of the assembly was, may partly be gathered from the following Oration. Demosthenes rose (then in his thirty-first year of age, according to others, in his twenty-eighth), and in a calm and temperate speech dissuaded the Athenians from adopting any such absurd resolution. He pointed out the folly of commencing hostilities, which they had not sufficient means to carry on: that the project of uniting the Greeks for such a purpose was chimerical; they were too jealous of one another and especially of Athens to join in any aggressive war, though they might possibly combine to resist a Persian invasion if it were really attempted. At present there was no cause for alarm: if Athens would keep quiet the Persian king would leave her alone; but if she attacked him without provocation, he would in all probability get some of the

## 248 The Orations of Demosthenes

Greek people on his own side. The true way of averting the supposed danger was, not to begin the attack but to put the country in a posture of defence, so that, whether menaced with war from Persia or from any other quarter, they might not be taken unprepared. How to make their defensive preparations was the chief thing to be considered; and to this question Demosthenes addressed himself in so masterly and practical a style that in the youthful orator might already be discerned the future statesman.

In this speech there is no effort to make a display of eloquence: it is confined to the giving of useful and simple advice. A definite plan is proposed for the regulation of the Athenian navy, by which the number of ships might be increased to three hundred, and a provision made for their speedy and punctual equipment. To effect this object, Demosthenes proposes a reform, from which the Oration takes its title, in the system of *Symmoriæ*, or *Boards for the Management of the Trierarchy*. The details of the proposed scheme are plainly set forth in the Oration itself, and will easily be understood by the reader.

It is pleasing to see Demosthenes, at the outset of his political career, coming forward to moderate the intemperate zeal of the people, to allay the ferment excited by factious demagogues and foolish dreamers—showing himself at the same time attached to the government of his country, and even to the form of her institutions, while he is desirous of adapting them to circumstances, and correcting the abuses by which their proper working was impeded. Here indeed is struck the key-note of that which for many years continued to be the policy of this great man: viz., to uphold the dignity of Athens on the basis of wise laws, to maintain her independence by the spirit and exertions of her own people, to rally round her, for empire and for safety, a host of willing confederates, united by the bonds of common interest, mutual confidence and esteem.

It appears to me, O Athenians, that the men who praise your ancestors adopt a flattering language, not a course beneficial to the people whom they eulogise. For attempting to speak on subjects, which no man can fully reach by words, they carry away the reputation of clever speakers themselves, but cause the glory of those ancients to fall below its estimation in the minds of the hearers. For my part, I consider the highest praise of our ancestors to be the length of time which has elapsed, during which no other men have been able to excel the pattern of their deeds. I will myself endeavour to show, in what way, according to my judgment, your preparations may most conveniently be made. For thus it is. Though all of us who intend to speak should prove ourselves capital orators, your affairs, I am certain, would prosper none the more: but if any person whomsoever<sup>1</sup> came forward,

<sup>1</sup> This is a modest allusion to himself.

and could show and convince you what kind and what amount of force will be serviceable to the state, and from what resources it should be provided, all our present apprehensions would be removed. This will I endeavour to do, as far as I am able, first briefly informing you what my opinion is concerning our relations with the king.

I hold the king to be the common enemy of all the Greeks; yet not on this account would I advise you, without the rest, to undertake a war against him. For I do not observe that the Greeks themselves are common friends to one another; on the contrary, some have more confidence in him than in certain of their own people. Such being the case, I deem it expedient for you to look that the cause of war be equitable and just, that all necessary preparations should be made, and that this should be the groundwork of your resolution. For I think, men of Athens, if there were any clear and manifest proof that the Persian king was about to attack the Greeks, they would join alliance and be exceedingly grateful to those who sided with and defended them against him: but if we rush into a quarrel before his intentions are declared, I fear, men of Athens, we shall be driven to a war with both the king and the people whom we are anxious to protect. He will suspend his designs—if he really has resolved to attack the Greeks—will give money to some of them and promise friendship: they, desiring to carry on their private wars with better success, and intent on projects of that kind, will disregard the common safety of all.

I beseech you not to betray our country into such embarrassment and folly. For you, I see, cannot adopt the same principles of action in reference to the king as the other Greeks can. It is open, I conceive, to many of them, to prosecute their selfish interests and neglect the body of the nation: it would be dishonourable in you, though you had suffered wrong, to punish the offenders in such a way as to let any of them fall under the power of the barbarian.

Under these circumstances, we must take care that we

ourselves engage not in the war upon unequal terms, and that he, whom we suppose to entertain designs upon the Greeks, do not gain the credit of appearing their friend. How can it be managed? By giving proof to the world that the forces of our state are mustered and prepared, and that possessing such forces we espouse sentiments of justice. To the over-daring, who are vehement in urging you to war, I have this to say: It is not difficult in the season for deliberation to earn the repute of courage, or, when danger is nigh, to be exceeding eloquent: it is, however, both difficult and becoming in the hour of danger to exhibit courage, in counsel to find better advice than other men.

It is my opinion, men of Athens, that a war with the king would distress our republic, though any action in the course of the war would be an easy affair. Why so? Because, methinks, every war necessarily requires a fleet and money and posts; and of all these things I perceive that he has a greater abundance than ourselves: but for action, I observe, nothing is so much needed as brave soldiers, and of these, I imagine, we and our confederates have the greater number. My advice therefore is, that we should by no means begin the war, though for action we ought to be fully prepared. If indeed there were one description of force wherewith barbarians could be resisted, and another wherewith Greeks, we might reasonably perhaps be regarded as arraying ourselves against Persia: but since all arming is of the same character; and your force must amount to the same thing, namely, the means of resisting your enemies, of succouring your allies, of preserving your valuable possessions; why, when we have professed enemies,<sup>1</sup> do we look out for others?

<sup>1</sup> This refers principally to the Thebans, between whom and the Athenians an enmity had subsisted ever since the severance of their alliance, when the Athenians, jealous of the growing power of Thebes under Épaminondas, went over to the side of Sparta. This enmity was increased by the events of the Sacred war, which had now been raging for two years, and in which the Thebans were engaged as principals on one side, while the Phocians received assistance from Athens and Lacedæmon. The Locrians and most of the tribes of Thessaly, then in alliance with Thebes, are to be reckoned among the enemies

why do we not rather prepare ourselves against the former, and be ready to resist the king also, if he attempt to injure us?

And now you invite the Greeks to join you. But if you will not act as they desire, some of them having no goodwill towards you, how can you expect they will obey your call? Because, forsooth, they will hear from you that the Persian has designs against them. And pray, do you imagine they don't foresee it themselves? I believe they do: but at present this fear outweighs not the enmity which some of them bear towards you and towards each other. Your ambassadors then will only travel round and rhapsodise. But when the time comes, if what we now expect be really brought to pass, I fancy none of the Greek community rate themselves so high that, when they see you possessed of a thousand horse, as many infantry soldiers as one could desire, and three hundred ships, they would not come with entreaties, and regard such aid as their surest means of deliverance. The consequences then are—by inviting them now, you are suppliants, and, if your petition be not granted, you fail: whereas, by waiting your time and completing your preparations, you save men at their own request, and are sure they will all come over to you.

Swayed by these and the like considerations, men of Athens, I sought not to compose a bold harangue of tedious length: but have taken exceeding pains in devising a plan, the best and the speediest, for getting your forces ready. It will be for you to hear it, and, if it meet your approval, to vote for its adoption.

The first and most essential part of preparation, men of Athens, is to be so disposed in your minds that every citizen is willing and earnest to perform his duty. For you see, O Athenians, whenever you have had a common wish, and every man has thought afterwards that the accomplishment belonged to himself, nothing has ever escaped you; but when

whom Demosthenes refers to: perhaps also the Olynthians and the revolted subjects of Athens.

you have wished only, and then looked to one another, each expecting to be idle while his neighbour did the work, none of your designs have been executed.

You being so animated and determined, I advise that we fill up the twelve hundred and make two thousand, adding eight hundred to them: for if you appoint that number, I reckon that, after deducting the heiresses and wards, and holders of allotments and partnership property,<sup>1</sup> and persons in reduced circumstances, you will still have your twelve hundred members. Of them I think you should make twenty boards, as at present, each having sixty members. Each of these boards I would have you divide into five sections of twelve men, putting always with the wealthiest person some of the least wealth, to preserve equality. And thus I say the members ought to be arranged: the reason you will understand when you have heard the whole scheme of arrangement. But how about the ships? I recommend you to fix the whole number at three hundred, and form twenty divisions of fifteen vessels each, giving five of the first hundred and five of the second hundred and five of the third hundred to each division; then allot one division of fifteen ships to every board of men, and let the board assign three ships to each of their own sections.

When these regulations have been made, I propose—as the rateable capital of the country is six thousand talents—in order that your supplies may be apportioned, you should

<sup>1</sup>The persons here enumerated were exempt from service of the *Trierarchia*. Heiresses and wards were exempt, because, although they might have property enough to defray the contingent expense, yet the service was connected with a personal trust, which by reason of sex and age they were incapable of performing. The colonial allottees were exempt, by reason of their absence. The operation of the law would be as follows. The state in the first instance looks to the visible property of the citizens, such as land, houses, stock in trade, or agriculture. A register is formed of the twelve hundred owners of property most competent to serve the office of *trierarch*. This register continues the same, until circumstances have happened which call for an alteration; and, practically speaking, the same families continue for a long period in the register. But (says Demosthenes) the thing worked so, that at any given time, when there was a call for service, the register could not be depended on for the whole number.

divide this capital and make a hundred parts of sixty talents each; then allot five of these hundredth parts to each of the twenty larger boards, and let the board assign one hundredth part to each of their own sections; so that, if you have need of a hundred ships, sixty talents may be applied to the expense, and there may be twelve to serve as commanders;<sup>1</sup> if of two hundred, there may be thirty talents applied to the expense, and six persons to serve; if of three hundred, there may be twenty talents defraying the expense, and four persons to serve.

In the same manner, O Athenians, I advise that all the furniture of the ships which is out on loan<sup>2</sup> should be valued according to the register, and divided into twenty parts; that you then allot one good portion to every large board; that every board distribute equal shares among their own sections; that the twelve in each section call their implements in, and get the ships which are severally allotted to them in readiness. Thus do I think the supplies, the vessels, the commanders, and the collection of implements, may be most effectually provided and arranged. How the manning may be made sure and easy, I proceed to explain.

I say the generals should divide the dockyards into ten departments, taking care that there be thirty docks in each as near as possible to one another; and when they have done this, let them attach two boards and thirty ships to each of these departments, then allot the tribes and the several commanders to each dockyard, so that there may be two boards, thirty ships, one tribe. And whichever department be allotted to a tribe, let them divide in it three and the ships likewise, and then allot the third of a tribe to each, so that of the whole dockyards there may be one division belong-

<sup>1</sup> *Trierarchs*. The name was kept up, when it had become a matter of contribution and civil trust, rather than of naval service. So, the Lord High Admiral of our own government might never have seen the sea.

<sup>2</sup> It was customary for individuals to borrow the naval implements and stores from the public arsenal, when the state had no occasion for them.

# END OF SAMPLE TEXT



The Complete Text can be found on our CD:  
**Primary Literary Sources For Ancient Literature**  
which can be purchased on our Website :  
[www.Brainfly.net](http://www.Brainfly.net)

or

by sending **\$64.95** in check or money order to :  
**Brainfly Inc.**  
**5100 Garfield Ave. #46**  
**Sacramento CA 95841-3839**

## **TEACHER'S DISCOUNT:**

If you are a **TEACHER** you can take advantage of our teacher's discount. Click on **Teachers Discount** on our website ([www.Brainfly.net](http://www.Brainfly.net)) or **Send us \$55.95** and we will send you a full copy of *Primary Literary Sources For Ancient Literature* **AND** our *5000 Classics CD (a collection of over 5000 classic works of literature in electronic format (.txt))* plus our *Wholesale price list*.

If you have any suggestions such as books you would like to see added to the collection or if you would like our wholesale prices list please send us an email to:

[webcomments@brainfly.net](mailto:webcomments@brainfly.net)